

NOTICES
OF
NEGRO SLAVERY,
AS
CONNECTED WITH
PENNSYLVANIA.
BY EDWARD BETTLE.

*Read before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 8th mo.,
7th, 1826.*

NOTICES, ETC.*

WE trust we shall not indulge hopes too sanguine, if we should now anticipate, that by the united labors of our Society, Pennsylvania will receive that illustration of her annals, character, and resources, which has so long been due to a State whose history in many important features is unique, and whose moral conduct exhibits lessons the most instructive, and examples the most encouraging, of active practical benevolence, and the positive application of the principles of Christianity to the administration of human affairs.

When we look at the history of Pennsylvania, as exhibited in the various important advances made by her citizens towards meliorating the condition of the oppressed and injured of the human race, and the relief of the miseries which crime has brought upon our species, our recollections are far more exalted and enduring than if we could boast our descent from the most illustrious

* For a short biographical notice of Mr. Bettle, see Appendix, Note III.

warriors and heroes whose names have been emblazoned on the historic page.

A century and a half have now nearly elapsed since the great sage and lawgiver of Pennsylvania landed on her shores, and gave the first impulse to that spirit of Christian philanthropy which has ever since continued, amid the wars and miseries of the old world, to shed its light and diffuse its warmth from the sanctuary of our native soil; and it is not the mere vaunt of egotism or the idle declamation of a contracted mind to assert, that from the humble and unpretending efforts of this youthful member of the commonwealth of nations have arisen many of those plans of benevolence which are now adopted and zealously prosecuted by the most enlightened philanthropists of all countries.

The axiom, that the object of all good government is the freedom, order, and happiness of the governed, is now considered so self-evident and undeniable, that we may hardly be able sufficiently to appreciate the great merit of William Penn in proclaiming the sound and comprehensive doctrines contained in his charter, bill of rights, and great law, at a period when the most profound statesmen held and promulgated far different ideas of the true and proper constitution of government.

In contemplating the character of Penn and his noble views and plans of melioration, we perceive for the first time an attempt to found a government upon the basis of practical Christianity, desiring no other end than the welfare of those who might live under its happy influence; we find a man the personal friend and acquaintance of a

despotic prince, and under a charter obtained from him founding a government recognizing the equal rights of all its citizens, educated in times of religious intolerance and persecution, and himself a severe sufferer for conscience sake, when invested with power, granting to such as differed from him in sentiment, nay, even to his oppressors, perfect freedom of religious opinion and practice.

We find him who was educated in a country where a sanguinary code of laws made the awful doom of death the indiscriminate punishment for the petty thief and the deliberate murderer, and at a time too when such a change was certain to be pronounced a visionary innovation, advocating and adopting that system of graduated and mitigated punishments which has since received the sanction of the wisest and best of his successors.

Sound judgment, comprehensive and enlarged policy, unbroken faith, and unsullied probity, formed in her early days the prominent characteristics of Pennsylvanian government; and, much as they may have been aberrated from, by many of her succeeding rulers, the influence of this early example has been powerfully operative upon her character and actions from that day to the present.

It is, however, beside our object at this time to expatiate upon the conduct of Penn and his coadjutors, in the prosecution of the ennobling designs to which we have alluded; our view is simply to show that from a government and people recognizing such principles and doctrines, and, in the midst of darkness and ignorance, displaying such vivifying light and knowledge, we might

rightfully expect to see a cordial and active support of all measures calculated to relieve the miseries of mankind.

Under this view of the character of the founders of our State, we might with safety anticipate that humane sympathy, that powerful and impressive precept, and that prompt and active exertion in relation to the oppressed sons of Africa, which it is the object of the present sketch briefly to delineate; and we propose now to consider the exertions of Pennsylvanians previously to the year 1770, and to make her subsequent history, from that time to the present, the subject of another memoir.

It is not necessary in this State to urge arguments to show the total hostility of slavery to Christianity, reason, and the unalienable rights of mankind; but it behooves every Pennsylvanian to speak forth his honest abhorrence boldly, and his manly indignation loudly, into those ears which are professedly open, but it is feared virtually and practically shut, to the appeals for liberty, right, and justice, of a large portion of the inhabitants of a country whose Constitution is founded upon the principle that liberty and the pursuit of happiness are unalienable rights which we receive from God, and of which no earthly power can ever rightfully dispossess us: and we trust it will be shown that, as Pennsylvania early stood forth as an advocate of this deeply-injured class of humanity, so will she now, from the known opinions of her citizens, from her local situation, and from her moral influence in our confederacy, be compelled to take a decided and prominent attitude, and to proclaim and sup-

port the sacred rights of man, regardless of the ridicule of the unprincipled, or the mercenary calculations of those with whom human flesh and sinews, and tobacco, cotton, and sugar, are equally legitimate objects of traffic. How can *we*, as citizens of the United States, remain silent, unconcerned spectators of an American slave-trade within our borders, in our capital city, the boasted centre of free government,—a traffic, the wretched objects of which are bred for sale as regularly as horses and cattle, and whose treatment whilst on their way to market and when in the field of labor is scarcely upon a par with our beasts of burden. This is no highly wrought picture of gone-by days, but the hourly experience and practice of the present time.

Upon a comprehensive view of the subject, we think it may be asserted boldly, and without fear of contradiction, that the worst slavery, the most total prostration of the rights of man, and the most entire degradation of the image of God, are exhibited in the bondage of the negroes. This is the slavery which is not only practiced and tolerated, on the plea that it is an entailed and unavoidable evil, but is absolutely defended in the House of Representatives of the freemen of the United States, as being consistent with Holy Scripture, and with the mild religion of our Redeemer. Negro slavery has been compared to the bondage of the Hebrews and Romans; but there is no parallel, scarcely a remote analogy between them. The slavery of the Hebrews was as the submission of sons to their fathers; the slaves formed part of one common household, of which the patriarch was the

kind paternal head; they labored in common with his own offspring. they tended his flocks with his own sons and daughters. they were protected by special ordinances of the Jewish law, and at the expiration of fifty years, there was a manumission of all slaves, and every one was entitled to land and money from their masters: and, in addition to this, there was that most important of all differences, viz., that Hebrew slavery was not hereditary. Even this mild kind of bondage extended no further than to those who were actually purchased by the master; their offspring were free, and instead of the heart-sickening certainty of the American slave, that the oppression under which he suffers will be perpetuated, perhaps in an aggravated form, to his latest posterity, the Jewish bondsman saw in prospective for *his* offspring liberty, and perhaps honor and happiness. Among the Romans, if a slave exhibited talents and became distinguished for his mental powers, he generally obtained his freedom; and many of the most illustrious poets, statesmen, and warriors of Rome were freedmen.* To compare then the kind and paternal government of the Hebrew slave, his certain prospect of obtaining an honorable freedom, or the hope of the Roman servant, who felt within his breast the energies and ambition of a powerful mind, to that dull, heartless, and oppressive reality, which sits like an incubus upon the breast of an American slave, that never to him shall the light of freedom dawn, or the present abjectness of his condition be changed for his

* See Stephens' Slavery of British West India Colonies, Vol. I., pp. 43, 44, 57, 64, &c.—EDITOR.

rightful station among the inhabitants of the earth; to compare the two prospects together, is to contrast the occasional overcast of bright day with the impenetrable gloom of starless midnight, or to equal the whispers of hope to the sullen silence of despair. To hear such arguments as these proceeding from the source whence they have emanated, is a bad omen; it looks like a deliberate design not to meliorate, and finally by degrees to abolish the evil, but rather, in the face of former professions, to perpetuate forever this open and palpable infringement of the very unction and spirit of our free institutions. We affect great sympathy for enslaved Spain, we profess much commiseration for degraded Italy; nay, we even reprobate the Holy Alliance, for not undertaking a crusade in favor of the quondam land of science and of song, and are almost ready ourselves to assist in driving the barbarians from her soil: but what avails this profession? Do not all our vaunts of republicanism and free government amount to sheer mockery and insult to the name of religion, justice, and liberty, so long as a large number of the States of our confederacy continue the American slavery and slave-trade.

We are well aware that this is a subject of a momentous nature, fraught with difficulty and embarrassment, and eminently deserving calm, dispassionate, and mature consideration; and we would be very far from recommending, nay, even desiring, the immediate abolition of slavery — in proportion to the magnitude of the evil will be the tardiness and difficulty of its eradication — but we do insist that no excuse whatever can be made *for the breed-*

ing system, for the American slave trade, and for the extension of slavery to new and uncontaminated soils, for the total deprivation of the negroes by law of literary, moral, and religious instruction, and that the State governments are bound to take some prospective measures, however slow in effect and remote in final execution, to clear our land from so foul a stain on the national character.

We frequently hear from those engaged in slavery strong expressions of abhorrence of the practice, and great desires for the abolition of the evil. It is believed that in many instances these professions are true and sincere, and we rejoice in the existence of such feelings; but we think we may be allowed to question their general verity, when we see, even in those States where there is least excuse for the permanent continuance of the evil, an anxious desire to defile with slavery new portions of our territories, and a steady adherence to their former cruel and degrading policy, without one solitary prospective glance at melioration, or one act which has the most remote bearing upon its abolition, but rather an increasing disposition to quench inquiry and discussion upon the subject. We shall not, however, at present, say more on these points, but proceed to our narrative.

In order to give a clear idea of the relative period at which slavery was first opposed in Pennsylvania, it may perhaps be proper to take a cursory review of the origin of the African slave trade, and of the opposition it encountered up to the year 1688.

The infamy of being the first who brought the miserable sons of Africa as slaves from their native soil

attaches itself to the Portuguese, who, as early as 1481, built a castle on the Gold coast, and from thence ravaged the country, and carried off the inhabitants to Portugal, where they were sold into bondage.* In 1503 slaves were first taken from the Portuguese settlements in Africa to the Spanish possessions in America; and from that time to 1511, large numbers were exported to the colonies of

* "Guinea supplied black slaves to the Moors of Africa, to redeem their countrymen made prisoners by Alfonso V of Portugal: this first originated the slave trade in 1442. Commences in West Indies, 1517; in Virginia, 1620; first effort for its abolition made by Granville Sharpe, 1772; petition of the London Common Council against it, Feb. 1, 1788; resolution of the Commons to take it into consideration in the next session, May 9, 1788; motion of Wilberforce against it lost, March 17, 1791; its gradual abolition voted, April 26, 1792; motion of Wilberforce negatived, April 3, 1798; Canning's attempt to prohibit it in Trinidad fails, May 27, 1802; the act for its abolition receives the royal assent, March 25, 1807."—*Rosse's Index of Dates*, Bohn's Library, Articles, "Guinea," and "Slave Trade." "To the honor of Denmark be it spoken, the slave trade was abolished by her five years before England performed that act of tardy justice to humanity."—*Twelve Months' Resid. in W. Indies*, by R. R. Madden, M. D., vol. ii., 128.

"At length, in the year 1279, Magnus became King of Sweden, and the eleven years of his reign, with thirteen of that of his son—during which the government, on account of his minority, was conducted by an able minister—formed the period of the greatest improvement in its earlier history * * * His son Birger being but eleven years old when he succeeded to the throne, the government was administered by a regent, during thirteen years, with wisdom and vigor; and in the interval it was enacted,* among other legislative reforms, that no man should thenceforward be bought or sold." *Miller's Philosophy of History*, vol. ii., 355, Bohn's edition.—EDITOR.

* "The influence of Christianity in producing this ordinance appears from the reason assigned in the law, that it was not just that one Christian should sell another, since Jesus Christ had purchased all with his blood."—*Puffend.*, p. 109.

Spain by permission of King Ferdinand V After his death, the proposal was made to the Regent of Spain, Cardinal Ximenes, by Las Casas,* Bishop of Chiapa, to establish a regular commerce in African slaves, under the plausible and well-intentioned, but fallacious pretext of substituting their labor in the colonies for that of the native Indians, who were rapidly becoming exterminated by the severity of their labor and the cruel treatment of their Spanish masters. To the immortal honor of Cardinal Ximenes, he rejected the proposition on the ground of the iniquity of slavery itself in the abstract, and also the great injustice of making slaves of one nation for the liberation of another. The Cardinal appears, therefore, to have been the first avowed opponent of this traffic in men. †

* It is said that Las Casas' proposal was first acted on in Cuba in 1523-4, at which time three hundred negroes were introduced from Spain.—*Answers of Senor —, of Havana, to Questions addressed by R. R. Mudden, M. D., London, 1840.* But Bancroft (vol. i., p. 169) says that it was not Las Casas who *first* suggested the plan of transporting African slaves to Hispaniola. There is no doubt, however, that such a proposal was made by him. See the documents brought to light by Quintana. The proof is so full, from his own writings and other authentic documents not difficult of access, that it would be quite out of place, and would take too much space, even to refer to them here.—*Quintana*, vol. iii., p. 467, as cited by Madden.

† "It is in vain to deny that Las Casas committed this most lamentable error (his suggestion in favor of the importation of African slaves into Cuba), as many have asserted, and amongst others, the Abbé Gregoire. Quintana has produced the original documents in which this suggestion is made by Las Casas; but they who claim Las Casas for an advocate of the slave trade are little aware that he himself, heartily repenting of his proposal, condemns it in his own history (lib. iii., chap. 101), and in his own words: 'Because they (the negroes) had the same rights as the Indians.'

After the death of this prelate, the emperor, Charles V., in 1517, encouraged the slave trade, and granted letters patent for carrying it on;* but he lived to see his error and most nobly renounced it, for he ordered and had executed a complete manumission of all African slaves in his American dominions. About this time Pope Leo X. gave to the world this noble declaration: "That not only the Christian religion, but nature herself cried out against a state of slavery." In the year 1562, in the reign of Elizabeth, the English first stained their hands with the negro traffic: Captain, afterwards Sir J. Hawkins, made a descent on the African coast, and carried away a number

"When the Episcopal dignity was conferred on him, on reaching his see, the first use he made of his pastoral power was to deny the sacraments to all those who held slaves and refused to give them up, and those who bought and sold them. * * * In the latest production from the pen of Las Casas he confesses the grievous fault he had fallen into, and begs for the forgiveness of God in the most contrite terms, for the misfortunes he had brought on the poor people of Africa by the inadvertence of his counsel, and this confession (says his historian) of his error, so full of candor and contrition, should disarm the rigor of philosophy, and hold his benevolent disposition absolved before posterity. Let him, whose philanthropy is without fault, and whose nature is superior to error, cast the first stone at the memory of the venerable Las Casas."—*Poems by a Slave in the Island of Cuba*, and to which are prefixed two pieces descriptive of Cuban slavery and the slave traffic, by R. R. Madden, M. D., London, 1840, pp. 152, 155.—EDITOR.

* "In 1517 Charles granted a patent to one of his Flemish favorites, containing an exclusive right of importing four thousand negroes into America. The favorite sold his patent to some Genoese merchants for 25,000 ducats, and they were the *first* who brought into a *regular form* that commerce for slaves between Africa and America, which has since been carried on to such an amazing extent."—Robertson, I. p. 321.—EDITOR.

of the natives, whom he sold to the Spaniards in Hispaniola; and, although censured by the queen, it appears that he still continued to prosecute the trade.* The French commenced this business about the same time, although Louis XIII. gave the royal sanction with reluctance, and only when soothed by the delusive pretext of converting the Africans to Christianity. In 1645 a law was passed by the General Assembly of Massachusetts, prohibiting the buying and selling of slaves, except those taken in lawful war or reduced to servitude for their crimes by a judicial sentence; and these were to have the same privileges as were allowed to Hebrew slaves by the law of Moses.† In 1713 the Legislature of Massachusetts imposed a heavy duty on every negro imported into the State.

The next in order amongst those worthy and enlightened men, who were the very early opponents of slavery, is the founder of the Society of Friends, George Fox. This pious Christian visited Barbadoes in 1671, and whilst

* See Holmes' Annals, I., p. 101, where he refers to Hakluyt, I., pp. 521, 522, for an account of this voyage. Hawkins says Stow (Chron. 807, quoted by Holmes) died in 1595, "as it was supposed of melancholy"—EDITOR.

† In this year a remarkable instance of justice to a negro, in execution of this law, occurred in Massachusetts. He had been fraudulently taken and brought from Guinea, was demanded of the purchaser by the Government, and the Court "resolved to send him back without delay." Perhaps this circumstance has led our author into the error of fixing this year as the date of this Act. It was part of the hundred laws, called the *Body of Liberties* (Winthrop's Journal, 237), established by the General Court of Massachusetts, in 1641.—See Holmes' Annals, I., 317, 335. Edition of 1805, and the authorities cited.—EDITOR.

there advised such of his brethren as held slaves to teach them the principles of religion, treat them mildly, and after certain years of labor set them free.*

Contemporary with George Fox was William Edmundson, who was a worthy minister of this society, and who also was a fellow traveller with Fox in Barbadoes.† Being brought before the Governor, on the charge of teaching the negroes Christianity, and thereby causing them to rebel and destroy their owners, he made an answer which we quote entire,—as it strongly shows that the same kind of clamor against giving negroes instruction which at present exists upon the same plea, that it would be inconsistent with the safety of their masters, has existed from the very beginning; and the answer which this worthy man gave to the slaveholders of that day is admirably adapted to those of the present time.‡ In reply to the charge recited above, he says, “That it was a good thing to bring them to the knowledge of God

* Further particulars respecting George Fox's advice concerning slaves, will be found in a series of papers prepared for the “Friend,” by Mr. Nathan Kite, entitled “Antiquarian Researches among the early Printers and Publishers of Friends' Books,” Vol. XVII.—EDITOR.

† Edmundson twice visited Barbadoes, once in 1671, and once in 1675. It was during his *second* visit that the events referred to in the text occurred.—Gough's History, III., 61. Edmundson's Journal, p. 85, Edit. of 1774.—EDITOR.

‡ “The earliest instances of such inconsistent persecution was in the Island of Barbadoes, in the year 1676, and to the honor of that truly amiable sect of Christians, the Quakers, their charity and liberality furnished the first opportunity for it by their singular and probably then unprecedented attempt to impart their own religion to the negroes.”—Stephens' Slavery of West Indies, I., 234.—EDITOR.

and Christ Jesus, and to believe in him who died for them and all men, and that this would keep them from rebelling and cutting any person's throat; but if they did rebel and cut their throats, as the Governor insinuated they would, it would be their own doing in keeping them in ignorance and under oppression, in giving them liberty to be common with women like brutes, and on the other hand in starving them for want of meat and clothes convenient; thus giving them liberty in that which God restrained, and restraining them in meat and clothing."*

In 1673, Richard Baxter, and, in 1680, Morgan Godwyn, both clergymen, wrote forcibly against slavery †

From 1680 to 1688, it does not appear that any public opposition to slavery was made; and, as the last-mentioned year was an important era in the history of Pennsylvania, as connected with this subject, we shall now proceed to embody the comparatively scanty and imperfect materials which we have been able to collect. Soon after the first settlement of Pennsylvania, a few slaves were introduced from the West Indies; and the practice was in some degree tolerated by Friends, as well as the other early settlers of the province, on the pretence of a

* After the Quakers, "The Moravians, that humble and zealous sect of Christians, next entered on this desolate field. They sent missions to the Antilles so early as 1732, and prior to 1787 had resident ministers in Antigua, St. Christopher, Barbadoes," &c. (*Stephens' Slavery of West Indies*, I., 237.) He quotes a planter as follows: "Since the Moravians have been established at St. Croix the treatment of the negroes has been more humane. The masters are very glad to have them go to the Moravians."—EDITOR.

† Godwyn also published a supplement to his "Negroes' and Indians' Advocate," in the following year.—EDITOR.

scarcity of laborers. The number imported, or the precise manner in which they were introduced, we have not been able to learn; the evil, however, soon became so obvious and increasing, as to excite the attention of the Society of Friends; and we may here remark that in the succeeding pages we shall often have occasion to notice the labors of this body of Christians. To the influence of their precept and example, to their moral weight in the community, and the untiring zeal and activity with which they prosecuted this work of benevolence, are mainly to be attributed the abolition of slavery in Pennsylvania.

About the year 1682, a number of persons of this society emigrated from Krieshiem, in Germany, and settled themselves in Pennsylvania; and to this body of humble, unpretending, and almost unnoticed philanthropists belongs the honor of having been the *first association* who ever remonstrated against negro slavery. In the year 1688, they presented a paper to the Yearly Meeting of Philadelphia, then held at Burlington, as appears by a minute of that meeting, protesting against the buying, selling, and holding men in slavery, as inconsistent with the Christian religion.* The Yearly Meeting then determined that, as the subject had reference to the members of the society at large, before resolving defini-

* "A paper being here presented by some German Friends concerning the lawfulness and unlawfulness of buying and keeping negroes; it was adjudged not to be so proper for this meeting to give a positive judgment in the case, it having so general a relation to many other parts, and therefore at present they forbear it."—*Extract from the Minutes.*

tively on any measure, time should be allowed for its mature consideration.

We have used many endeavors to obtain a copy of this highly interesting document; but are sorry to believe that neither the original nor the copy is in existence.* We cannot, however, pass from this paper without paying a small tribute of admiration and gratitude to these early and dignified friends of human freedom and happiness.

With the information now so generally diffused in regard to the total hostility of slavery to religion and the rights of man, we cannot perhaps fully appreciate the enlightened views and clear discernment, which enabled these humble individuals to proclaim doctrines and principles so much in advance of the received opinions of the age; for at that time, as has been before remarked, negro slavery was a far less appalling and extended evil than at present. Even by many philanthropists it was esteemed rather a blessing than a curse, and was encouraged on the plausible pretence of meliorating the condition of the Africans themselves, by imbuing them with Christianity, and dispelling their mental darkness and gloom; and, by the comparative mildness of their treatment, some countenance was given to these delusive opinions. In the midst then of mitigating circumstances, did these worthy men, taking the abstract principles of right and wrong for their guide, and possessing a manly sense of the rights of their fellow creatures, proclaim to the world that, while they emigrated to enjoy their own

* See note on page 412, at the end of this article.—EDITOR.

liberty, they were willing to extend its blessings universally.

In 1696, several papers from the subordinate meetings having been read, the Yearly Meeting, after deliberation, issued this advice,—“That Friends be careful not to encourage the bringing in of any more negroes; and that such as have negroes be careful of them, bring them to meeting, and have meetings with them in their families, and restrain them from loose and lewd living, as much as in them lies, and from rambling abroad on first days.” In this year also, George Keith and his friends, who had seceded from the Quakers, published a paper on the subject, containing some very sound and cogent arguments. They asserted that the negroes were men, the common objects, with the rest of mankind, of redeeming love; that they had been taken by violence from their native land, and were unjustly detained in bondage; and finally, that the whole institution of slavery was contrary to the religion of Christ, the rights of man, and sound reason and policy.

The next efforts in favor of the negroes were made by the founder of our State.* A mind so liberal, expansive, and benevolent as his could not be indifferent to a subject of this highly interesting character; and, from the first introduction of slaves into Pennsylvania, he appears to have been desirous of improving their condition. Accordingly, in 1700, he introduced the subject to the monthly

* For an interesting review of Penn's opinions upon slavery and the growth of his convictions upon the subject, see Dixon's Life, pp. 301, 302; Phila. Ed., 1851.—EDITOR.

meeting of Philadelphia, and the following minute was made by that body, viz. : —

“Our dear friend and governor having laid before this meeting a concern that hath lain upon his mind for some time, concerning the negroes and Indians, that Friends ought to be very careful in discharging a good conscience towards them in all respects, but more especially for the good of their souls, and that they might, as frequent as may be, come to meetings on First Days; upon consideration whereof, this meeting concludes to appoint a meeting for the negroes, to be kept once a month, &c., and that their masters give notice thereof in their own families, and be present with them at the said meetings as frequent as may be.”

These resolutions having been adopted without difficulty by his own immediate friends, he proceeded in his work of benevolence, and endeavored to secure a proper treatment of slaves among all descriptions of persons by a legislative act. As a preliminary to further measures he was anxious to improve their moral condition, and by degrees to fit them for liberty and happiness; and accordingly introduced into the Assembly a bill “for regulating negroes in their morals and marriages,” and also a bill “for the regulation of their trials and punishments.” To the great astonishment and chagrin of the worthy governor, the first of these bills was negatived, and his humane intentions for the present defeated.*

This unexpected result is attributed by Clarkson, in

* “His latest action in the colonial legislature was in behalf of the poor negroes.” — Dixon’s Life of Penn, p. 330.—EDITOR.

his Life of Penn, to various reasons, viz.: the hostility which then prevailed in the Assembly to all projects emanating from the executive—the jealousies which existed between the province and territories—the influx of emigrants of a lower tone of moral feeling than the first settlers of the colony, and the diminution of Quaker influence in the Assembly; the executive council, composed wholly of members of this society, having concurred with Penn in proposing the bill.

The same causes appear to have been in operation for several years after; and we accordingly find a degree of severity and rigor in the legislative enactments of 1705, entirely at variance with the humane policy of Penn and with the benevolent laws of a very few years later date.

The law of 1705 was entitled “an act for the trial and punishment of negroes.” The act provided that negroes convicted of heinous crimes, such as murder, manslaughter, burglary, rape, &c., should be tried by three justices of the peace and six freeholders of the vicinage; that the punishment of death should be awarded to such offences; that any negro convicted of carrying arms without his master’s consent, should, on conviction before a magistrate, receive twenty-one lashes; and finally, that not more than four negroes should meet together without their master’s permission, on the penalty of receiving any number not exceeding thirty-nine lashes, on conviction before one justice of the peace. This law was intended as a substitute for William Penn’s act of 1700, for the “trial and punishment of negroes.” In this same year a

law was passed to prevent the importation of Indian slaves, under penalty of forfeiture to the governor; and also a bill laying a duty on all negroes imported into the province. In 1710 a law of similar character was enacted.

In 1711 the Yearly Meeting of Philadelphia, on a representation from the Quarterly Meeting of Chester, that the buying and encouraging the importation of negroes was still practised by some members of the society, again repeated and enforced the observance of the advice issued in 1696, and further directed all merchants and factors to write to their correspondents and discourage their sending any more negroes.

This year also is memorable in the annals of Pennsylvania, on account of the passage of a bill entitled, "An act to prevent the *importation of negroes and Indians into the province.*"

We have not been able to obtain a sight of this highly important and interesting document. It is doubtful indeed whether a copy of it is in existence, as it was repealed in England, directly after its passage, by an order of council. The loss of such a law is the more to be regretted, as it evinces a striking alteration of temper and feeling in the Legislature since the enactments of 1705, a change which can only be attributed to the exertions of the friends of freedom, and the influence of more enlightened public opinion; and as a further evidence that the minds of many of the citizens of Pennsylvania were alive to this interesting subject, and anxious to prevent the further growth and increase of what they

began already to experience as a serious evil, we find, in 1712, that, undismayed by the repeal of the non-importation law of the preceding year by the court of England, a petition, "signed by many hands," praying for a duty to discourage the further importation of negroes, was presented to the Assembly, and after mature consideration, a bill laying the then enormous duty of twenty pounds per head was passed, which well-intentioned and effective law shared the same fate in the English council as the act of 1711. We may here take occasion to observe, that all the designs of the early legislators of Pennsylvania to improve the condition of her citizens, and to substitute, for the oppressive policy of the old world, a more free, humane, and happy condition of things in the new, were rendered void through the repeal, by English orders of council, of all such laws as had these noble and excellent designs in view. This circumstance will account for the little subsequent notice taken of the subject by the Legislature of our State, with the exception of a few laws, which we shall soon mention, from this period up to 1770. Our intervening history will be principally confined to the exertions of the Society of Friends and of private individuals.

In 1712, a petition was presented to the Assembly by William Southeby,* praying for the total abolition of slavery in Pennsylvania; on consideration, the House

* William Southeby had been a resident of Maryland, and a Roman Catholic. In 1696, he wrote papers against slavery. A sketch of his life, by Mr. Nathan Kite, will be found in XXVIII. Vol. of "The Friend," pp. 293, 301, 309.—EDITOR.

decided that the prayer of the petitioner could not be granted. In the years 1715-17-21-26 and 29, different laws were passed, laying duties on negroes; these, with a bill of 1725-6, entitled an act for the better regulating of negroes in the province, are all the notices of the subject that we have been enabled to find on the votes of the Assembly up to 1761. The hostility of the English government to any supposed encroachment on the trade of the country, even in human flesh, appears to have been sufficient to prevent any further attempts to abolish this cruel traffic. Though the law of 1725-6, for the better regulating the negroes, contained some harsh provisions, it provided that the existing duty on negroes should be increased to 10*l.* per head; the third section obliged a master, on manumitting his slave, to give security that he should not become chargeable to the county; the fifth section enacted that no minister or magistrate should marry a negro with a white person under penalty of 100*l.*, and that no negro be more than ten miles from home, without written permission from his master.

In 1761, we find the last effort made to check the importation of slaves previous to 1770. In this year, remonstrances were presented to the Assembly from a large number of the inhabitants of Philadelphia, representing the mischievous effects of the slave-trade, and praying for such an increase of the duty on negroes as might effectually check further importation. After much debate in the House, and altercation with the Governor, a bill increasing the impost was passed. In 1768, this

bill, having expired by its limitation, was re-enacted. Thus much for the acts of Assembly.*

To return to an earlier period. In the year 1712, the Yearly Meeting of Philadelphia addressed an epistle to the Yearly Meeting of Friends in London, stating that for a number of years they had been seriously concerned on account of the importation and trade in slaves, and of the detention of them and their posterity "in bondage without any limitation or time of redemption from that condition;" that the meeting, by its advice, had endeavored, and in some degree succeeded in discouraging the traffic; yet, that as "settlements increased so other traders flocked in among them over whom they had no Gospel authority," and that the number of negroes was thereby greatly increased in the province; they desired that the London Yearly Meeting would consult with Friends in the other colonies who were more engaged in

* The following is a list of all the Acts, prior to the Revolution, and is somewhat fuller than that in the text. They are those of 1705, 1710-11, 1712, 1715, 1717-18, 1720, 1722, 1725-6, 1729, 1761, 1768, and 1773,—which last was made perpetual.

The Acts of date subsequent to 1705, are but modifications of the one of that year; for, when through the bigoted policy of the mother country, a repeal took place, another, so soon as expediency allowed, was passed by the Assembly. The objection on the part of the superior authorities was not because of the spirit of some of the provisions of the Acts, which might have been better, but sprang from a determination to force upon the Province an institution to which it was averse.

Our author mistakes in supposing a law was passed in 1711; that to which he alludes, but regrets he has not seen, was the one of 1712, of the main feature of which he seems to have been aware.

A fuller reference to these enactments will be found in a note, at p. 415.—EDITOR.

slaveholding than those in Pennsylvania; that in this matter of so general importance, a union of opinions and practice might be obtained; and further desiring the advice and counsel of English Friends in the case. These requests were acceded to, as appears by the epistle from Pennsylvania to London, in 1714; which states, that they kindly received the advice of English Friends upon the subject, and were one in opinion with them, "that the multiplying of negroes might be of dangerous consequence," and that, therefore, a law was obtained in Pennsylvania, imposing a duty of 20*l.* a head upon all imported, but the queen had been pleased to disannul it; that they heartily wished that some means could be discovered of stopping the further importation, and desired the influence of the society in England with the government there, to endeavor to prevail on the queen to sanction such further anti-slavery laws as the Legislature of Pennsylvania might adopt. They further stated that they did not know of any Friend who was concerned in importing negroes from Africa, and concluded by desiring the Yearly Meeting of London to continue its advice and assistance to Friends in the other slaveholding colonies. In 1715 and 16 and 19, advice was issued by the Yearly Meeting of Pennsylvania, strongly urging that Friends should not only decline importing, but also purchasing, when imported, any slaves; and that those who had them in possession, should treat them with "humanity and a Christian spirit," and endeavor to instruct them in morality and the principles of religion.*

* For the several protests of the English Friends, against the importation and holding of slaves, from 1726 to 1761 inclusive, see

The next laborer in behalf of the negroes whom we shall have occasion to notice, is Ralph Sandiford. He was descended from a respectable family in Barbadoes, and was educated as a member of the Episcopal Church, by a pious tutor, probably in Great Britain. On emigrating to Pennsylvania, he joined the Society of Friends, and soon began to direct his attention towards the condition of the black population. He rejected many advantageous propositions of pecuniary advancement, as they came from those who had acquired their property by the oppression of their slaves, and appears to have been very earnest and constant in his endeavors to prevail both on the members of his own religious society, as well as his friends generally, entirely to relinquish the practice of slaveholding. In 1729, he appeared as a public advocate of the blacks, by publishing a work, entitled "The Mystery of Iniquity, in a Brief Examination of the Practice of the Times," which he circulated at his own expense wherever he deemed it might be useful. We have never read the essay, but the author is represented to be a man of talents and unquestioned probity, and the work as every way worthy of him. In the words of Clarkson, "it was excellent as a composition. The language was correct. The style manly and energetic, and

"Extracts from the Minutes and Advices," &c., printed by James Phillips, in 1783; and an Epistle, in 1763.—*Annual Epistles from the Yearly Meeting in London*, p. 273. Baltimore, 1806.

In this year, 1718, appeared "An Address to the Elders of the Church," by William Burling, strongly condemnatory of slaveholding. "The same year," says Benjamin Lay, "I was convinced of the same 'hellish practice.'"—EDITOR.

it abounded with facts, sentiments, and quotations, which, while they showed the virtue and talents of the author, rendered it a valuable appeal in behalf of the African cause." For some expressions in reference to his brethren, which he supposes would be considered severe, he apologizes, by saying that they were wrung from him by his intense feeling of the magnitude of the oppression, with which he was sometimes so impressed that "he felt as if the rod had been upon his own back."*

In 1730-35-36 and 37 the Yearly Meeting of Philadelphia was informed by some of its subordinate branches, that though the *importation* of negroes had been abandoned by members of the Society, yet that some still persisted in buying them when imported: the meeting, therefore, in these respective years, issued advice enforcing the minutes made upon the subject on former occasions, and strongly recommending to the Monthly Meetings (who are the executive departments of the Society) to be diligent in cautioning and admonishing such of their members as might give cause of offence. In 1737 the Quarterly Meetings were directed to furnish in their reports at the next Annual Meeting a succinct statement of the actual practice of their members in this respect. In 1738, in answer to this requisition, and also in the years 1739 to 1743, it appeared that the members who continued to purchase slaves were constantly decreasing.

We shall next notice that early, honest, but over-zealous

* See the interesting memoirs of Sandiford and Lay, by Roberts Vaux.

opponent of the bondage of men, Benjamin Lay.* He was an Englishman by birth, brought up as a seaman, and after pursuing that occupation for several years, settled in Barbadoes; but the wretchedness and misery which he there witnessed, and the heart-rending scenes of cruelty and oppression, of which he was a daily observer, so affected his sensitive mind as to induce him, a few years afterwards, to quit the Island and emigrate to Pennsylvania. Here he likewise found the evil he so much shunned and abhorred, but in a far different and much mitigated form. He regarded slavery, however much disguised and qualified, still as a "bitter draught," and reprobated the practice with the same zeal and license of language which he had used in attacking West India bondage; and from his eccentricity of manner and too great warmth of expression, he is thought to have been less useful and influential than he otherwise might have become; yet he was a man of a strong and active mind, of great integrity and uprightness of heart, and one who no doubt acted from what he conceived to be the dictates of his conscience; hence we can most justly forgive his intemperate words and actions, and regard him as an early, honest, and active friend of oppressed humanity.

In 1737 he published his treatise "on slave-keeping," a work evincing talents and considerable force of ex-

* In the xxix. vol. of "The Friend" will be found sketches entitled Early Anti-Slavery Advocates, prepared by Mr. Nathan Kite. These embrace the lives of William Burling, Ralph Sandiford, and Benjamin Lay; in which last two some errors into which their former biographer has inadvertently fallen will be found corrected. — EDITOR.

pression, though liable to the objections to which we have above adverted. This essay he distributed gratuitously, and was particularly anxious to have it introduced into schools, in order to awaken the sympathies of those who were about entering into active life.

He also solicited and obtained interviews upon the subject of slavery with the governors of several of the States; and, in short, to the time of his death, which occurred in 1760, in his 80th year, he was constant and untiring in his labors.

In 1754 the Yearly Meeting of Pennsylvania printed and circulated a letter of advice to its members, reminding them of its often expressed and well known will upon the subject of buying slaves, and urging some cogent arguments to show the anti-christian nature of the traffic, and the awful responsibility that those masters were under who neglected to guard the morals of their slaves, and to imbue their minds with religion and virtue. It may be found at length in Clarkson's History of the Slave Trade.

In 1755, finding that, in opposition to the reiterated advice of the body, some of its members continued to persist in buying negroes, the Yearly Meeting made a rule of discipline directing that such persons as adhered to the practice, after suitable admonition by their Monthly Meetings, should be disowned from the religious communion of the Society.

Having thus prevented the further increase of slaves by purchase, the Society was desirous of advancing still further towards a complete eradication of slavery from

amongst its members. Accordingly, in 1758, it was unanimously agreed that Friends should be advised to manumit their slaves, and show their sense of gratitude to the Divine Being, from whom they received the liberty which they so freely enjoyed, by extending this blessing to all their fellow-creatures; and John Woolman and others were appointed a committee to visit such Friends as held slaves, and endeavor to prevail on them to relinquish the practice. This committee, it appears from the minutes of the Yearly Meeting, continued to prosecute their work of benevolence during the years 1758-59-60 and 61—and from their reports, these Christian endeavors were crowned with much success, many being induced to cleanse their hands from the stain of slave-keeping. The Yearly Meeting constantly continued its attention to this subject to the year 1776, when it was enacted that all Friends who refused to manumit their slaves should be disowned by the Society. A more particular account of this noble act we reserve for our succeeding essay on this subject.

We are next called upon to notice one of the most pious and indefatigable laborers in the cause of freedom and human happiness whom the Society of Friends ever produced, viz., John Woolman. This excellent man was born in the State of New Jersey, in the year 1720, and at a very early age was distinguished for his attachment to religion;* which so increased and strengthened in after-

* “Before I was seven years old, I began to be acquainted with the operations of divine love.”—*Woolman's Journal*.—EDITOR.

life, that we think it may be safely asserted that, for self-denial, purity of manners and conversation, firm, consistent and persevering prosecution of duty, and zealous and enlightened benevolence, he has rarely been equalled, and perhaps never excelled.

He appears very early in life to have had his mind engaged in reflection upon the subject of slavery. Soon after he attained the age of twenty-one years, being hired as an accountant, he was directed by his employer to write a bill of sale for a negro, which, in obedience to his instructions, he did, though, as he himself says, not without great uneasiness of mind, and that he afterwards found it to be his duty to inform his master and the purchaser of the slave that "he believed slavekeeping to be a practice inconsistent with the Christian religion;" and, on a subsequent application by another individual to prepare an instrument of writing of a similar kind, he entirely refused, alleging the foregoing conviction as his excuse.

In 1746, he travelled as a minister of the Society of Friends, through the provinces of Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina, where it appears that his mind was again engaged and his feelings excited, and that he took occasion during the journey to communicate his convictions on this deeply-interesting subject to many of the inhabitants. He says, he "saw in these southern provinces so many vices and corruptions increased by this trade and this way of life [viz., the whites living idly and luxuriously on the labor of the blacks], that it appeared to him as a gloom over the land."

In 1753, he published the first part of his "Considerations on Keeping Negroes,"* in which he insists on the rights of the negroes as children of the same Heavenly Parent with their masters, and that slavery is repugnant to the Christian religion.

In 1756, he made a religious visit to Long Island, and was much engaged with members of his own society to prevail on them to release their slaves. Hitherto he had only acted as circumstances casually came in his way, but now he appeared in the character which he continued until his death to support, of an active and untiring laborer in this righteous cause.

In the year 1757, in company with his brother, he engaged in an arduous journey through the southern colonies, in order to convince persons, principally of his own society, of the wickedness and impolicy of slavery. He sought opportunities of friendly conference with individuals, and urged his arguments with calmness and modesty, and, at the same time, with dignity and firmness; and also in the meetings for discipline of his own society, he was indefatigable in pressing the subject, and had the satisfaction of finding that by some he was kindly received, and of perceiving a disposition in others to adopt his views.

We have before noticed that he was appointed by the Yearly Meeting of Philadelphia, in 1758, one of a committee of that body for discouraging slaveholding amongst

* "Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes, Recommended to the Professors of Christianity of every Denomination."—First printed in 1753-4.—EDITOR.

its members,* and as he had been very instrumental in producing this appointment, so he was also indefatigable in discharging the duties it required; and, in this year and the subsequent one, he made several journeys into various parts of Pennsylvania for the promotion of this object. In the year 1760, he travelled into Rhode Island, on a similar errand, and also visited the Island of Nantucket.† In 1761, he visited some families in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. In 1762, he published a second part of his "Considerations on Slavekeeping."

This essay is written with considerable ability and force of expression, and is well worthy of perusal at the present day. He urges the rights of the slaves to their freedom in common with the rest of mankind; shows the debasing and demoralizing effect which the institution of slavery in any country produces on both masters and servants, and the fallacy of comparing negro slavery to the condition of the Jewish bondsmen; and concludes by reciting some testimony to illustrate the abominable character of the African slave-trade.‡

In 1767,§ this apostle of freedom travelled again in Maryland, and again urged his enlightened opinions. In

* Daniel Stanton, John Scarborough, and John Sykes were his fellow visitors to those Friends who had slaves, in 1758. John Churchman and Samuel Eastburn, in 1759.—EDITOR.

† On this visit, he was accompanied by his "beloved friend," Samuel Eastburn.—EDITOR.

‡ This pamphlet he published at his own expense, although his friends "offered to get a number printed to be paid for out of the Yearly Meeting stock, and to be given away." His reasons are characteristic.—See his Journal, p. 136. Edition of 1775.—EDITOR.

§ 1768. Journal, p. 188.—EDITOR.

1772, he embarked for England, and whilst there, endeavored to induce the society of which he was a member to interfere with the government of England on behalf of the oppressed Africans.

The time, however, had arrived when this faithful laborer was to be released from his arduous service, and to receive in the mansions of eternal rest the reward of his works. He died in the city of York, England, of the small-pox, in 1772, aged fifty-two years.*

Contemporary with Woolman was that pious and excellent friend of the human race, Anthony Benezet,—a man who combined, in an eminent degree, shining virtues, excellent talents, and indefatigable industry; who lived and labored with the most well-directed assiduity for the good of all mankind, and who died regretted by those, and they were not few in number, who had seen and known and admired his long career of useful practical benevolence.

He was born in France, of respectable parents of the Protestant profession, in the year 1713, who, at the revocation of the Edict of Nantz, removed with their infant son into Holland, and shortly after into England. Anthony here received a liberal education, and served an apprenticeship in an eminent mercantile house in London. Having joined himself in membership with the Society of Friends, in 1731 he emigrated to Philadelphia, which was from that time the permanent place of his residence. In 1736, he married, and turned his attention to establishing

* "Get the writing of John Woolman by heart; and love the early Quakers."—*Charles Lamb*.—*Essays of Elia*.—EDITOR.

himself in business. With respect to this subject, his mind appears to have been much unsettled; not, as is generally the case, anxious to resolve on the profession which might yield the greatest pecuniary emolument, but much more concerned how he might devote his time and talents to the service of his Creator and the advancement of the happiness of his fellow creatures. At the age of twenty-six, he believed it to be his duty to assume the arduous engagement of an instructor of youth. After teaching a short time in the Academy at Germantown, in 1742 he accepted of the office of English tutor in the "Friends' Public Schools in Philadelphia," in which situation he continued for twelve years, much to the satisfaction of his employers. In 1755, he opened a school on his own account for the instruction of females; and, by the excellence of his moral and literary tuition, and his peculiar fitness for this interesting duty, it long continued to be one of the best patronized and most highly useful seminaries of Philadelphia.

About the year 1750, according to the account of his highly respected biographer,* his attention appears to have been first engaged upon that important subject which afterwards engrossed so large a portion of his time and talents. His feelings having become deeply interested on account of the oppressed and degraded condition of the blacks, the first essays which he made were of that practical kind so highly characteristic of the man. Being impressed with the importance of meliorating, in the first

* Roberts Vaux.

place, their mental condition, he imposed on himself, in addition to the laborious duties of his own school, the task of giving in the evenings gratuitous instruction to the negroes of Philadelphia; and he had the great satisfaction to discover, by the improvement of his pupils in literature, as well as their moral advancement, that the hitherto long asserted idea of their mental inferiority to the rest of mankind was fallacious and illusory.*

Having excited in the minds of his fellow-citizens an increased interest and sympathy for this oppressed people, he proceeded to make more public the results of his reflections and experience. His first writings consisted of small pieces in the almanacs and newspapers of the day, which medium he selected as best adapted to engage all classes of people in favor of his benevolent designs. In 1762 he published "An account of that part of Africa inhabited by the Negroes." In 1767, "A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and her colonies on the calamitous state of the enslaved Negroes." This work was examined and approved by the Society of Friends in Pennsylvania, as appears by the minutes of meetings of the representatives of that body, held in 1766, at whose expense a large number of copies were printed and sent to England for distribution. 3d. "An Historical Account of Guinea, its situation, produce, and the general disposition of its inhabitants; with an inquiry into the rise

* The same enlightened views were held by John Bartram, who has done so much honor to Philadelphia in other ways. As one of the earliest anti-slavery champions he deserves mention in this place.—*Darlington's Mem. of John Bartram*, pp. 41, 54.—EDITOR.

and progress of the slave trade, its nature and calamitous effects."*

This book is remarkable for having given to the venerable Thomas Clarkson some of the first definite information with regard to facts, which enabled him practically to commence his long career of activity and usefulness; and we cannot do better than to give Clarkson's character of the work in his own words:

"This pamphlet contained a clear and distinct development of the subject from the best authorities. It contained also the sentiments of many enlightened men upon it; and it became instrumental, beyond any other book ever before published, in disseminating a proper knowledge and detestation of this trade."

With such limited pecuniary means as the occupation of school-keeping afforded, Benezet distributed large numbers of these valuable and instructive books; he sent copies of the *Historical Account of Guinea* to some of the most eminent men in Europe, accompanied with a circular letter, written in a simple and unadorned, yet forcible and convincing manner; in addition to this, all the time he could command from his regular occupations was employed in an extensive correspondence with such persons as he thought might be interested in promoting the cause to which he was so unceasingly devoted. Amongst those whom he addressed at different times were the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Fothergill, Granville Sharp, the Abbe Raynal, John Wesley, George Whitfield, the

* London, 1772. 8vo.—EDITOR.

Countess of Huntingdon, and Charlotte, Queen of England. He also made an appeal in behalf of the negroes to the Queens of France and Portugal.

We cannot, perhaps, better illustrate his diligence and the extent and variety of his engagements than by quoting the words of his intelligent biographer. He remarks :

“It was characteristic if one day he were seen surrounded by the sable children of Africa, imparting advice and deriving information from them concerning the cruelties they had suffered, and the next engaged in composing essays on the subject; addressing letters to friends and strangers, from whom he hoped some aid could be obtained; or, with an innocent boldness worthy of his office, spreading the cause of the poor negro, in the language of warning and persuasion, before statesmen and sovereigns.”

These great, and in a degree, effective exertions, were sedulously continued during the whole course of his long life; the two last years of which were devoted to the tuition of negroes, in a free school founded and endowed by the Society of Friends.

A review of the extent and variety of his efforts, the personal exertions which he used, the constancy as well as zeal with which he pursued the investigation and exposure of every branch of the subject, we think entitles us to adopt the short but full eulogium which Clarkson pronounces respecting him. “Anthony Benezet,” says he, “may be considered as one of the most zealous, vigilant, and active advocates which the cause of the oppressed

Africans ever had. He seemed to have been born and to have lived for the promotion of it; and, therefore, he never omitted any the least opportunity of serving it."

His active mind also embraced many other objects of benevolence. He was deeply impressed with the anti-Christian tendency of war, and its hostility to the happiness of mankind, and wrote several able tracts on the subject; and also corresponded thereupon with many distinguished characters. His private charities were numerous and unostentatious. In short, it appears to have been the primary concern of his life to imitate, according to his ability, the example of our Holy Redeemer, in constant acts of benevolence and good will to mankind.

With all these good works there was connected one remarkable trait of his character which beautified and adorned all his other excellencies, and that was his great humility. Shortly before his death he uttered these expressions: "I am dying, and feel ashamed to meet the face of my Maker, I have done so little in his cause." He also desired an intimate friend to prevent, if possible, any posthumous memorial of him; and added, "If they will not obey this wish, desire them to say, 'Anthony Benezet was a poor creature, and through divine favor was enabled to know it.'"

This distinguished philanthropist died in 1784, in the seventy-first year of his age, after bequeathing the little fortune he had accumulated by industry and economy to the overseers of Friends' Public Schools, that it might be appropriated to the education of the blacks.

We have now closed our notice of the efforts of Pennsylvania in behalf of the negroes, antecedent to the year 1770; and have shown, we trust, that our forefathers were active and ardent laborers in the righteous cause of human freedom and happiness. We propose, in a future essay, to exhibit the further history of our State, as connected with this subject, up to the present time.

The lamented writer reserved for another Memoir the history, subsequent to 1770, of slavery in Pennsylvania. We do not propose to complete the task, yet believe our duty will not have been fulfilled without some further reference to the subject.

The good seed sown by the honest German Friends in 1688 did not perish, for what great truth ever has? The abolition of slavery continued to be agitated without, however, any immediate results. What a peaceful policy could not effect was at last accomplished by the Revolution; * so then, as now, political convulsion hastened the development of events, that otherwise might have been a score of years in ripening. Thus is history ever repeating itself.

On the 9th of November, 1778, George Bryan, the Vice President, in his message called the attention of the Assembly to the subject, and said, "the late Assembly *was furnished with the heads of a bill* for manumitting infant negroes, born of slaves, by which the gradual abolition of servitude for life would be obtained in an easy mode. It is not proposed that the present slaves, most of whom are scarcely competent of freedom, should be meddled with, but all importations must be forbid, if the idea be adopted. This or some better scheme would tend to abrogate slavery, the opprobrium of America, from among us; and no period seems more happy for the attempt than the present, as the number of such unhappy characters, ever few in Pennsylvania, has been much reduced by the practices and plunder of our late invaders. In divesting the State of slaves you will equally serve the cause of humanity and policy, and offer to God one of the most proper and best returns of gratitude for his great deliverance of us and our posterity from thralldom: you will also set your

* Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed, by his grandson, William B. Reed, vol. ii., p. 178.

character for justice and benevolence in the true point of view to all Europe, who are astonished to see a people eager for liberty holding negroes in bondage."

Again, on the 5th of February, 1779, we find that President Reed called the attention of the Assembly to the subject, and on the 9th of September in the same year, in a message to the House he said: "We would also again bring into your view a plan for the gradual abolition of slavery, so disgraceful to any people, and more especially to those who have been contending in the great cause of liberty themselves, and upon whom Providence has bestowed such eminent marks of its favor and protection. We think we are loudly called on to evince our gratitude, in making our fellow men joint heirs with us of the same inestimable blessings, under such restrictions and regulations as will not injure the community, and will imperceptibly enable them to relish and improve the station to which they will be advanced. Honored will that State be, in the annals of history, which shall first abolish this violation of the rights of mankind, and the memories of those will be held in grateful and everlasting remembrance, who shall pass the law to restore and establish the rights of human nature in Pennsylvania. We feel ourselves so interested on this point, as to go beyond what may be deemed, by some, the proper line of our duty, and acquaint you that we have reduced this plan to the form of a law, which, if acceptable, we shall in a few days communicate to you."*

The auspicious day at length arrived. The work of the friends of human liberty in Pennsylvania was at last completed, and on the 1st of March, 1780, an act was passed for the gradual abolition of slavery.

The preamble of the Act, one of the noblest compositions on record, and the act itself, were from the pen of George Bryan.

Slavery from this began gradually to disappear, as will be seen from an official document of the Department of State, at Washington.†

In 1790 there were	3,737 slaves.
1800	"	"	.	.	1,706 "
1810	"	"	.	.	795 "
1820	"	"	.	.	211 "
1830	"	"	.	.	386 "

* *Idem*, 173; Penna. Archives, vii. 79; Journal of House of Rep., 307, 364.

† Hazard's Register, vol. xvi. 120.

That this population, after having, from 1790 to 1820, steadily diminished, should, between the latter period and 1830, have increased, arrested the attention of our Legislature, and at the session of 1833 a committee was appointed by the Senate — of which our late venerable member, Mr. Samuel Breck, was chairman — “to investigate the cause of increase, and report by bill or otherwise.”* The committee remark, “that so large an addition to a class of our population, which we had every reason to believe was nearly extinguished, has excited considerable attention, even beyond the limits of our commonwealth, and has become in some degree a reproach to the State. Our neighbors in New York and citizens of other States have asked, through the medium of the public prints, how it happens that, while slavery has almost ceased to exist in the States north and east of us, the land of Penn, which took the lead in emancipation, and contains so many citizens of distinguished philanthropy, so many associations formed expressly for the promotion of abolition, so many friends of the African race, always on the watch to detect abuses, and ever eager to aid in correcting them, should exhibit an increase of slaves?”

By the law of 1780 it was in effect enacted, that the children of all negroes and mulattoes, held to servitude, born within the State after the 1st of March, 1780, should be held to service until the age of twenty-one, and no longer; and one of the causes of the increase the committee found arose from a misconstruction of the Act in some of the counties of the State, by which the grandchild of a registered slave was held to the same term of service as the mother, whom the law had pronounced free at twenty-eight, an error which was corrected in 1826 by the Supreme Court. Another cause, as stated by the committee, was that “negroes of all ages are brought in considerable numbers into the southwestern counties, bordering on Virginia, and emancipated on condition of serving a certain number of years, seldom exceeding seven, unless they happen to be mere children. About half the usual price of a slave is paid for this limited assignment; at the expiration of which the individual obtains entire freedom, both for himself and such of his children as may be born in Pennsylvania.” The committee were therefore not disposed to recommend any measure that might disturb the usage, as such a course would shut the door of philanthropic Pennsylvania to those who, from motives of humanity and interest, might wish to grant

* Hazard's Register, vol. xi. 158.

manumission to their slaves, and from investigation they were of the opinion that 67, instead of 386, constituted the number of slaves existing in 1830.

We have remarked that George Bryan was the author of the Act of 1780, abolishing slavery in Pennsylvania. It has, however, been stated that it was the current report at the Bar, at the beginning of the present century, and at the close of the last, that the late William Lewis was its draughtsman. To us, it seems that no one can read Mr. Bryan's Message to the Assembly, already quoted, and the Preamble to the Act, without being struck with a similarity in sentiment and style. His feelings had long been deeply concerned for the welfare of these poor creatures; and, as the first who officially suggested abolition, common opinion, if expressed at all upon the occasion, would, as a matter of course, have pointed to him as the proper person to draught the bill, nor are the terms and character of its clauses such as that any one, thoroughly skilled in legislation and familiar with the subject, might not as readily have drawn as Mr. Bryan. The Preamble required higher powers, and as to his abilities for the whole task, if any doubt exists, Mr. Bryan appears to have possessed them in an eminent degree. He is described, in an "Extract" from a Funeral Discourse upon his death, preached January 30th, 1791, by the Rev. Dr. Ewing, Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, and to be found in the IX. Vol. of Carey's American Museum, p. 81, of the same year, "As formed by nature for a close application to study, animated with an ardent thirst for knowledge, and blessed with a memory surprisingly tenacious, and the uncommon attendant, a clear, penetrating, and decisive judgment; his mind was the storehouse of extensive information on a great variety of subjects. Thus endowed and qualified, he was able, on most occasions, to avail himself of the labors and acquisitions, the researches and decisions of the most distinguished luminaries that had finished their course and set before him. You could, therefore, with confidence, generally depend upon his judgment as the last result of laborious investigation and mature decision.

"And if you add to these natural and acquired endowments, the moral virtues and dispositions of his heart, *his benevolence and sympathy with the distressed*, his unaffected humility and easiness of access upon all occasions, his readiness to forgive, and his godlike superiority to the injuries of a misjudging world (in imitation of his divine Master, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again), his inflexible integrity in the administration of justice, together with his

exalted contempt of both the frowns and the blandishments of the world, you will find him eminently qualified for the faithful and honorable discharge of the various public offices which he filled, with dignity and reputation, even in the worst of times, and in the midst of a torrent of unmerited obloquy and opposition. Such an assemblage of unusual qualifications and virtues as adorned the character of our departed friend but seldom unite in a single man."

Mr. Bryan is not mentioned in the "Extract" from Dr. Ewing's Discourse as the author of the Act, but in a note, probably appended by Mr. Carey, and which contains an obituary account, from Dunlap's American Advertiser, his life and character are thus portrayed:* "Previously to the Revolution, he was a representative in the General Assembly of Pennsylvania, and delegate in the Congress which met at New York, in 1765, for the purpose of petitioning and remonstrating against the Stamp Act and other arbitrary measures of the British Parliament.

"In the contest, he took an early, decisive, and active part with this country. When, by the Declaration of Independence, it became necessary to erect governments upon the authority of the people, he was appointed Vice-President of the Supreme Executive Council of this Commonwealth; and, by the unfortunate death of the late President Wharton, in May, 1778, he was placed at the head of the government of Pennsylvania, during the summer and autumn of that turbulent and eventful year. His office having expired by the limitation of the Constitution, in the autumn of 1779, he was elected a member of the Legislature. In this station, amidst the pressing hurry of business, the rage and clamors of party, and the tumult of war and invasion, in despite of innumerable prejudices, he *planned* and executed the '*Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery*,'—a monument which, instead of mouldering like the proud structures of brass and marble, bids fair to flourish in increasing strength.

"He was afterwards appointed a Judge of the Supreme Court, in which office he continued till his death; and during his exercise of it, he was, in 1784, elected one of the Council of Censors, under the late Constitution, of which body he was (to say the least) one of the principal and leading characters. * * * * Besides the offices which have been enumerated, he filled a variety of public, literary, and charitable employments: in some of which he was almost continually

* The Pennsylvania Gazette of February 2, 1791, contains a copy of the same notice.

engaged,—and in all of which he was highly active and useful. * * * The firmness of his resolution was invincible, and the mildness of his temper never changed. His knowledge was very extensive; the strength of his memory verified what has been thought incredible or fabulous, when related of others. His judgment was correct, his modesty extreme, his benevolence unbounded, and his piety unaffected and exemplary. * * * *If he failed in any duty, it was that he was possibly too disinterested,—his own interest was almost the only thing he ever forgot.*”

In the Arch Street Presbyterian Burying-ground, the inscription upon his tomb records (and his memory deserves a more fitting memorial) that he “died 27th of January, 1791, aged sixty years; that he was among the earliest and most active and uniform friends of the rights of man before the Revolutionary War. As a member of the Assembly of Pennsylvania and of the Congress at New York, in 1765, and as a citizen, he was conspicuous in opposition to the Stamp and other Acts of British tyranny. He was equally an opponent of Domestic Slavery. The emancipation of people of color engaged the feelings of his heart and the energies of his mind, *and the Act of Abolition, which laid the foundation of their liberation, issued from his pen.*”

The italics are our own. Against this emphatic testimony, no word of dissent, so far as we know, was ever raised. And it is not to be believed that his right to authorship, asserted with the knowledge of his associates in his philanthropic work—at the very period of his death—in the public prints, and also upon his tomb, would have remained uncontradicted had it been unfounded.

The Preamble, in which the claims to human liberty are so grandly and convincingly set forth, is not readily accessible; and we trust we shall be excused for here presenting it:

“When we contemplate our abhorrence of that condition to which the arms and tyranny of Great Britain were exerted to reduce us, when we look back on the variety of dangers to which we have been exposed, and how miraculously our wants in many instances have been supplied and our deliverances wrought, when even hope and human fortitude have become unequal to the conflict, we are unavoidably led to a serious and grateful sense of the manifold blessings which we have undeservedly received from the hand of that Being from whom every good and perfect gift cometh. Impressed with these ideas, we conceive that it is our duty, and we rejoice that it is

in our power, to extend a portion of that freedom to others which hath been extended to us, and release from that state of thralldom, to which we ourselves were tyrannically doomed, and from which we have now every prospect of being delivered. It is not for us to inquire why, in the creation of mankind, the inhabitants of the several parts of the earth were distinguished by a difference in feature or complexion. It is sufficient to know that all are the work of an Almighty hand. We find, in the distribution of the human species, that the most fertile as well as the most barren parts of the earth are inhabited by men of complexion different from ours and from each other; from whence we may reasonably as well as religiously infer, that He who placed them in their various situations, hath extended equally his care and protection to all, and that it becometh not us to counteract his mercies. We esteem it a peculiar blessing granted to us that we are enabled this day to add one more step to universal civilization, by removing, as much as possible, the sorrows of those who have lived on under cruel bondage, and upon which, by the assumed authority of the Kings of Great Britain, no effectual legal relief could be obtained. Weaned by a long course of experience from those narrow prejudices and partialities we had imbibed, we find our hearts enlarged with kindness and benevolence towards men of all conditions and nations; and we conceive ourselves at this particular period extraordinarily called upon, by the blessings which we have received, to manifest the sincerity of our profession, and to give a substantial proof of our gratitude.

“And whereas the condition of those persons who have heretofore been denominated Negro and Mulatto Slaves, has been attended with circumstances which not only deprived them of the common blessings that they were by nature entited to, but has cast them into the deepest afflictions by an unnatural separation and sale of husband and wife from each other and from their children, an injury the greatness of which can only be conceived by supposing that we were in the same unhappy case. In justice, therefore, to persons so unhappily circumstanced, and who, having no prospect before them whereon they may rest their sorrows and their hopes, have no reasonable inducement to render their services to society, which they otherwise might; and also in grateful commemoration of our own happy deliverance from that state of unconditional submission to which we were doomed by the tyranny of Britain.

“Be it enacted, &c.”*—EDITOR.

* I. Dallas' Laws, 838.

In 1844 Mr. Nathan Kite accidentally discovered, among some of the papers belonging to the Society of Friends in Philadelphia, this valuable and long sought document. He immediately caused it to be printed in xvii. vol. of the "Friend," p. 125, and remarks:

"The testimony of the Friends at Germantown against slavery,* sent up to the Yearly Meeting of 1688, has, within the last few days, been discovered. These Friends were Germans, and mostly from Cresheim, a town not far from Worms in the Palatinate. They had suffered persecution in their own country, and seem to have had a very correct appreciation of the rights of others. * * * Coming from a country where oppression on account of color was unknown, and where buying, selling, and holding in bondage human beings, who had been legally convicted of no crime, was regarded as an act of cruelty and injustice, to be looked for from the hands of none but a Turk or barbarian, the members of this little community were shocked to see that negro slavery had taken root, and was increasing around them. * * * It is certainly a strong document, and whilst it bears evidence that the writers had an incompetent knowledge of the English language, it plainly demonstrates that they were well acquainted with the inalienable rights of man and with the spirit of the gospel. We publish it as it is in the original, and doubt not that our readers will find sufficient clearness in the argument, notwithstanding some confusion in the use of propositions."

"THIS IS TO THE MONTHLY MEETING HELD AT RICHARD WORRELL'S:

"These are the reasons why we are against the traffic of men-body, as followeth. Is there any that would be done or handled at

* The poet Whittier celebrates the praises of these lovers of liberty for all in the following lines:

"Lay's modest soul, and Benezet the mild,
Steadfast in faith, yet gentle as a child;
Meek-hearted Woolman and that brother band,
The sorrowing exiles from their 'Father Land.'
Leaving their homes in *Krieshiem's* bowers of vine,
And the blue beauty of their glorious Rhine,
To seek, amidst our solemn depths of wood,
Freedom for man and holy peace with God;
Who first of all their testimonial gave
Against the oppressor for the outcast slave."

Whittier's Poems, 168, Edition of Mussey & Co., Boston, 1845.

this manner? viz., to be sold or made a slave for all the time of his life? How fearful and faint-hearted are many on sea, when they see a strange vessel,—being afraid it should be a Turk, and they should be taken, and sold for slaves into Turkey. Now what is *this* better done than Turks do? Yea, rather is it worse for them, which say they are Christians; for we hear that the most part of such negers are brought hither against their will and consent, and that many of them are stolen. Now, though they are black, we cannot conceive there is more liberty to have them slaves, as [than] it is to have other white ones. There is a saying, that we shall do to all men like as we will be done ourselves; making no difference of what generation, descent, or color they are. And those who steal or robb men, and those who buy or purchase them, are they not all alike? Here is liberty of conscience, which is right and reasonable; here ought to be likewise liberty of the body, except of evil-doers, which is another case. But to bring men hither, or to rob and sell them against their will, we stand against. In Europe there are many oppressed for conscience sake; and here there are those oppressed which are of a black colour. And we who know that men must not commit adultery,—some do commit adultery *in* others, separating wives from their husbands and giving them to others; and some sell the children of these poor creatures to other men. Ah! do consider well this thing, you who do it, if you would be done at this manner? and if it is done according to Christianity? You surpass Holland and Germany in this thing. This makes an ill report in all those countries of Europe, where they hear of [it], that the Quakers do here handel men as they handel there the cattle. And for that reason some have no mind or inclination to come hither. And who shall maintain this your cause, or plead for it? Truly we cannot do so, except you shall inform us better hereof, viz., that Christians have liberty to practise these things. Pray, what thing in the world can be done worse towards us, than if men should rob or steal us away, and sell us for slaves to strange countries; separating husbands from their wives and children. Being now this is not done in the manner we would be done at [by], therefore we contradict, and are against this traffic of men-body. And we who profess that it is not lawful to steal, must, likewise, avoid to purchase such things as are stolen, but rather help to stop this robbing and stealing if possible. And such men ought to be delivered out of the hands of the robbers, and set free as in Europe.* Then is Pennsylvania to have a good report,

* “Alluding probably to the abolition of the old feudal system.”

instead it hath now a bad one for this sake in other countries. Especially whereas the Europeans are desirous to know in what manner the Quakers do rule in their province:—and most of them do look upon us with an envious eye. But if this is done well, what shall we say is done evil?

“If once these slaves (which they say are so wiked and stubborn men) should join themselves,—fight for their freedom,—and handel their masters and mistresses as they did handel them before; will these masters and mistresses take the sword at hand and war against these poor slaves, like, we are able to believe, some will not refuse to do? or have these negers not as much right to fight for their freedom, as you have to keep them slaves?

“Now consider well this thing, if it is good or bad? And in case you find it to be good to handel these blacks at that manner, we desire and require you hereby lovingly, that you may inform us herein, which at this time never was done, viz., that Christians have such a liberty to do so. To the end we shall [may] be satisfied in this point, and satisfy likewise our good friends and acquaintanees in our native eountry, to whom it is a terror or fearful thing, that men should be handelled so in Pennsylvania.

“This is from our meeting at Germantown, held y^e 18 of the 2 month, 1688, to be delivered to the Monthly Meeting at Richard Worrell’s.

Garret henderich
deriek up de graeff
Francis daniell Pastorius
Abraham jr. Den graef.

“At our Monthly Meeting at Dublin, y^e 30—2 mo., 1688, we having inspected y^e matter above mentioned, and considered of it, we find it so weighty that we think it not expedient for us to meddle with it here, but do rather eommit it to y^e consideration of y^e Quarterly Meeting; v^e tenor of it being nearly related to y^e Truth.

“On behalf of y^e Monthly Meeting,

“Signed,

P. JO. HART.

“This, above mentioned, was read in our Quarterly Meeting, at Philadelphia, the 4 of y^e 4th mo., ’88, and was from thence reeomended to the Yearly Meeting, and the above said Derick, and the other two mentioned therein, to present the same to y^e above said meeting, it being a thing of too great a weight for this meeting to determine.

“Signed by order of y^e meeting,

ANTHONY MORRIS.”

The Act of 1705 was entitled, "An Act to prevent the importation of Indian slaves."

"If, after the 25 March, 1706, any person shall import or cause to be imported any *Indian slaves* or servants whatsoever, from any province or colony in America into this province, by land or water," * * * they "shall be forfeited to the governor, and shall be either set at liberty, or otherwise disposed of as the governor and council shall see cause." The Act made an exception in favor of "menial servants in the family of the importer," &c., &c. — Bradford Laws, Philadelphia, 1714.

"An Impost Act, laying a duty on negroes, wine, rum, and other spirits, cider, and vessels," passed 28th, 12th month, 1710.

Imposed for the space of three years, from and after the 10th day of March, 1710, a duty of forty shillings per head on every negro imported, excepting such as belonged to persons residing in the province and importing for their own service, and in case of failure to pay such duties under certain limitations, such negroes so landed, if taken, "shall be forfeited and seized, and after due proof," sold "for the utmost the same will fetch."

"An Act to prevent the importation of negroes and Indians into the province," passed in 1712.

The first section imposed a payment of twenty pounds per head upon every negro or Indian brought into the province.

SECTION 2. Masters of vessels, &c., bringing them were required to make a return of their number and to whom they belonged; "all such negroes and Indians" (in whose case any of the provisions were violated) "shall be seized and sold by the said officer for the time being (hereinafter named), and the monies arising thereby shall be paid to the provincial treasurer for the uses hereinafter directed." Duties paid upon any negro or Indian imported, but to be exported within twenty days, were to be returned; all such were to be "actually and *bona fide* forthwith shipt off or sent out of the province, so as never to return again, without complying anew with the direction of this Act, otherwise all such negroes and Indians shall be liable to the same penalties and seizures as tho' the same had never before been entered."

3. Samuel Holt appointed "to put Act in execution, and shall by virtue hereof have full power to make strict enquiry into the premises, and upon information or other probable cause of suspicion, without any further or other warrant, may [upon the parties' refusal], with

the assistance of the sheriff or constable [who are thereby required to be acting therein], break open any house or place suspected, and seize or cause to be seized all such negroes or Indians as shall be found concealed or otherwise, whose owners or possessors have not complied with the Act according to the true intent and meaning thereof; and thereupon to dispose of such as shall be so seized, by a public vendue, for the most they will yield, and when reasonable charges are deducted shall pay the produce or price thereof, and all other sums arising by this Act (retaining one shilling for every pound for his trouble therein), into the provincial treasurer's hands," &c.

4. Said Holt to keep a distinct and fair book of account, &c. This section further provides that any person prosecuted for anything done in pursuance of Act may plead the general issue, and give the Act and special matter in evidence. The duty of twenty pounds was not to be exacted in the case of those Indians or negroes belonging to persons in the province, and sent out of it "on their masters' business with intent to return again." "Runaway negroes or Indians" were subject to reclamation within twenty days after the arrival of their owners in the province, but were to be sold after the expiration of twelve months in case no owner appeared. "Gentlemen and strangers travelling in the province" were allowed to retain their negro or Indian slaves for a time not exceeding six months. — Bradford Laws.

These Acts seemed to have had their origin in policy rather than in justice. If the importation could be prevented, it was well; if not, the punishment fell upon the slave, but indirectly upon those who attempted to violate the law. Had all who were brought in been declared free, and those who brought them punished, a course would have been pursued more in accordance with humanity and right. Such, however, was the harsh treatment of the mother country that even these Acts were repealed, and the subsequent modifications of her views upon slavery and the amelioration of her very cruel criminal code were due to the humane example of some of those States which as colonies or provinces she had governed. — EDITOR.

